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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 001693

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TAGS: PHUM PREL PTER PGOV PINS PNAT YM

SUBJECT: DETAINED PROTEST LEADER TRANSFERRED TO SANAA

REF: A. SANAA 1656
 B. SANAA 1550

Classified By: Chief of Mission Stephen Seche for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Unconfirmed media reports claim that retired Brigadier General Nasir al-Nawba has been transferred from Aden to Sanaa for prosecution by the ROYG on charges of high treason. Al-Nawba, head of the United Retired Military Officers Coordination Council, lead the 1 September Southern protests to demand the reinstatement of thousands of Southern cadres into the military after their forced retirement following the 1994 Civil War. The ROYG has yet to respond to these allegations. However, in a 9 September meeting with Poloff, Mohamed Abu-Lahoum, head of the Foreign Relations Department of the ruling party, said he expected al-Nawba to be released before Ramadan. Assistant Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled al-Akwa, denied any knowledge of the incident during a meeting on the same day. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) There are unconfirmed reports from opposition and independent media that Brigadier General Nasir al-Nawba, head of the United Retired Military Officers Coordination Council, was transferred from Aden to Sanaa on 9 September, along with eight other detained retired officers. The transfer was purportedly ordered so that authorities in Sanaa can prosecute the detainees on charges of high treason which, according to Yemeni law, may be punishable by death. The ROYG has yet to respond officially to these allegations.

¶3. (C) Mohamed Abu-Lahoum, head of the Foreign Relations Department of the ruling General People's Congress Party, spoke to Poloff about al-Nawba during a 9 September courtesy call. He said, "I am sure he (al-Nawba) will be released just before Ramadan." Assistant Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled al-Akwa was studiously noncommittal on the topic when asked about al-Nawba in a 9 September meeting with Poloff. He denied having any knowledge of the case but went on to say in situations like these it is important to separate the person from the policy.

¶4. (U) Al-Nawba was reportedly kidnapped from his home in Aden on 3 September and taken to al-Tawahi Prison after leading the Southern protests of 1 September to demand the reinstatement of thousands of Southern cadres into the military after their forced retirement following the 1994 Civil War (reftel A and B). Protests in the South are expected to escalate with this latest development. Post will continue to closely monitor and report on the situation as it develops.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The opposition has already called for more protests against the ROYG's treatment of al-Nawba and other Southern detainees. It is expected that if President Saleh does not act fast to quench Southern discontent, North-South tensions will worsen, as the South increasingly becomes unified against what it sees as Northern injustice. It is tradition that prior to Ramadan, Saleh displays his

compassionate leadership by releasing detainees from prison. There is a possibility, as Abu-Lahoum expects, that Saleh will release al-Nawba to curry favor with the South. While this is hoped for by the Southerners, even this move may be too little too late without accompanied reform. END COMMENT SECHE